

THE MILITANT

INSIDE

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A SOCIALIST NEWSWEEKLY PUBLISHED IN THE INTERESTS OF WORKING PEOPLE

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Capitalist crisis stirs protests in E. Europe

BY RÓGER CALERO

The crisis fueled by the world capitalist contraction in production and trade is being felt in several Eastern European countries, forcing thousands into the streets.

“Eastern Europe is heading for a violent ‘spring of discontent,’” said the British newspaper *The Observer*, after a string of protests took place in Latvia, Lithuania, and Bulgaria.

In Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, 7,000 gathered January 16 to protest government cuts in wages and benefits, and tax increases.

Three days earlier 10,000 people protested in the Latvian capital, Riga, against an austerity package announced in December as part of negotiations with the International Monetary Fund and the European Union for loans.

Government officials in Lithuania have said they need to impose budget cuts in order to avoid seeking a bailout from the IMF.

Farmers protesting low prices for
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U.S. military prepares for ‘failed state’ in Mexico

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

A report recently issued by the United States Joint Forces Command says, “In terms of worst-case scenarios . . . two large and important states bear consideration for a rapid and sudden collapse: Pakistan and Mexico.”

The command’s “Joint Operating Environment 2008” report discusses future wars the U.S. military must be ready to fight. Its conclusion about Pakistan and Mexico is presented in the document’s chapter on “weak and failing states.”

Based in Norfolk, Virginia, the Joint Forces Command oversees army, navy, air force, and Marine Corps operations for the Atlantic Ocean geographical region. Its current mandate includes leading the “transformation of U.S. military joint warfighting into the 21st Century,” according to the command’s Web site.

“The Mexican possibility may seem less likely,” the report states, but the drug wars ravaging Mexico “will have a major impact on the stability of the Mexican state.” Mexico is Washington’s
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End Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip!

Over 1,300 dead as Israeli troops withdraw



Reuters

A woman shouts in front what used to be her house in Jabalya, a refugee camp just north of Gaza City where nearly every dwelling was hit by the Israeli onslaught.

BY SETH GALINSKY

January 20—After a three-week offensive in which Israeli war planes, artillery, and armor bombed thousands of targets, including schools, homes, factories, and food and fuel warehouses in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli government announced a cease-fire and withdrawal of its troops. The broad outlines of the conditions imposed on Palestinians in

the Gaza Strip are becoming clear in the aftermath of the defeat of Hamas by the Israeli military in the assault.

While some details are still being worked out, the deal includes an “international” force to oversee the Egyptian-Gaza border; more help by the Egyptian government to crack down on “arms smuggling” through border tunnels; Eu-
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Longshore workers union local joins fight to free Cuban Five

BY OMARI MUSA

MIAMI—A local of another international labor union in the United States has issued a letter calling on the U.S. president to free five Cuban revolutionaries who have been held unjustly in U.S. jails for a decade.

In a January 15 letter addressed to President Barack Obama, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10 president Melvin Mackay states, “On behalf of all members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 10, we urge you to look into the case of the internationally known Cuban Five, and immediately free them so they can return to their families in Cuba.” ILWU Local 10 is based in San Francisco.

The Cuban Five are René González, Ramón Labañino, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando González, and Gerardo Hernández. They were arrested in 1998 in Miami and convicted in a 2001 frame-up trial on various charges of conspiracy to commit espionage. Hernández was also convicted of conspiracy to commit murder.

Mackay says in his letter that the Cuban Five were in the United States “because of the unwillingness of past U.S. administrations to act and put an end to terrorist actions emanating from Miami that [have] resulted in the death of more

than 3,400 Cubans.” He notes that they were convicted after “a highly politically motivated trial in Miami, the only city in the U.S. where five men accused of being agents of the Cuban government could not have a fair trial.”

Defense attorneys for the five were denied a change of venue. Labañino, Hernández, and Guerrero received life sentences. René González was sentenced to 15 years and Fernando González to 19.

Mackay also calls the denial of visas to Olga Salanueva and Adriana Pérez, wives of René González and Gerardo Hernández respectively, “an additional and unnecessary punishment.” He calls on the government to grant them visas to visit their husbands.

“President Obama, we appeal to your sense of justice and ask you to act immediately to put an end to this travesty of justice. We know that if you learn about the case, you will understand that the Cuban Five are innocent,” Mackay’s letter concludes.

The letter from the ILWU is the second sent to a U.S. president from a major union in the United States asking for the granting of visas for Salanueva and Pérez. In July 2008, a similar letter was sent to George Bush on behalf of the Service Employees International Union by its president, Andrew Stern.

‘Militant’ starts four-week drive to win long-term readership

BY ANGEL LARISCY

The *Militant* is launching a four-week campaign to increase our long-term readership, with a goal of winning 350 people or more to renew their subscriptions. The campaign will run from January 24 to February 24. (See initial chart on page 4).

Last fall close to 2,400 people subscribed to the *Militant*—1,900 for the first time. Most of these subscriptions are now expiring. Supporters should begin by asking people to sign up for a one-year subscription—\$35 for 50 issues.

The renewal drive offers an opportunity to get to know these subscribers, meet with them to talk about politics, and encourage them to get involved in activities such as the Socialist Workers local election campaigns or protest actions.

This will be an opportunity for supporters of the socialist newsweekly to reach out to subscribers who have been following the *Militant*’s coverage of the Israeli aggression in Gaza, many of whom have also been part of the protests against it. Over the past couple of weeks, dozens of people have subscribed to the paper at these actions and we encourage distributors to order larger bundles as part of the effort.

The renewal campaign takes place at the same time as the publication of new

Pathfinder titles—*Capitalism and the Transformation of Africa: Reports from Equatorial Guinea* and *Is Socialist Revolution in the U.S. Possible? A Necessary Debate*—in English and Spanish. The titles are being offered at a discounted price. Many of those who renew will be interested in these books.

To help in the effort to increase the long-term readership, new subscribers who sign up for six months or longer will be counted toward quotas along with renewals.

Join the effort! Renew your subscription today and encourage your coworkers, fellow students, friends, and relatives to sign up.

Also Inside:

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Judge sets ‘contempt’ trial for Sami al-Arian

BY SUSAN LAMONT

ALEXANDRIA, Virginia—Sami al-Arian, a supporter of the Palestinian national liberation struggle, will go on trial March 9 on criminal contempt charges, Judge Leonie Brinkema ruled January 16. The courtroom was packed with nearly 70 of al-Arian’s supporters and family members. Many had made the 900-mile drive from Tampa, Florida. Others, including representatives of the Muslim American Society and Arab-American Federation, came from the Washington, D.C., area and New York City.

Brinkema denied a series of motions by al-Arian’s attorneys aimed at getting the charges against him dismissed and ending government persecution of the activist.

Al-Arian was a professor of computer science at the University of South Florida in Tampa when he was arrested in February 2003 on frame-up charges of terrorism.

Despite being found innocent on the terrorism charges by a federal jury in December 2005, which also voted 10-2 in favor of his innocence on other charges, al-Arian was returned to prison. He later agreed to plead guilty to “conspiracy to provide services” to Palestinian Islamic Jihad in return for immunity from further prosecution and agreement to be deported from the United States.

Despite the plea agreement, al-Arian remained in prison. In April 2008 he was granted bail, but Immigration and Customs Enforcement then incarcerated him. He was finally released in early September.

On June 26, government prosecutors charged al-Arian with criminal contempt for refusing to testify before a federal grand jury investigating a Virginia-based Islamic organization. These are the charges that Brinkema refused to dismiss at the January 16 hearing.

While allowing the government’s case to go forward, Brinkema denied a prosecution motion for an anonymous jury, in which the identity of jurors is not made public. She also ruled that the jury will be given at least some of the background on the case, including that al-Arian was acquitted of the previous charge of terrorism.

For more information contact www.freesamialarian.com.



Militant/Seth Dellinger
Sami al-Arian (center) leaving court after Judge Leonie Brinkema ordered him to stand trial on “contempt” charges. To his left is his wife Nahla and his attorney Jonathan Turley.

Lebanon meeting hails Cuban Revolution

BY GEORGES MEHRABIAN

BEIRUT, Lebanon—One thousand people, many of them waving Cuban and Palestinian flags, packed the hall at the 50th anniversary celebration of the Cuban Revolution here January 7 at the UNESCO Palace. The event was sponsored by the Lebanese Solidarity Committee for the Freedom of the Five Cuban Prisoners.

The Cuban Five, as they are known—Gerardo Hernández, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González, René González, and Antonio Guerrero—have been imprisoned in U.S. jails for 10 years on frame-up charges including “conspiracy to commit espionage” and in one case, “conspiracy to commit murder.” When arrested, they were monitoring the ac-

tivities of Florida-based Cuban exile organizations that have carried out terrorist actions against Cuba with Washington’s complicity.

The brutal Israeli military assault on Gaza was at the center of all the speeches and discussions.

The keynote speaker was Dario de Urrea, Cuban ambassador to Lebanon. De Urrea said, “The Vietnamese people defeated U.S. imperialism. Likewise, the Iraqi, the Lebanese, and the heroic people of Gaza who are today under siege and war by Israel, can defeat imperialism.”

The youthful crowd included hundreds of Palestinians from the several refugee camps in Lebanon and from

Palestinian groups, including Fateh, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

Leaders of Lebanese organizations including the Popular Nasserist Movement, Communist Party of Lebanon, and Hezbollah addressed the event. Samir Qantar, the honorary chair of the committee, also spoke. Qantar was held in Israeli jails for 30 years.

The speakers referred to the honorable and unflinching support of Cuba since the first days of the Cuban Revolution to the Arab people’s struggle against Israel. Aazmi Bshara, a Palestinian and former member of the Israeli Knesset, sent greetings.

‘Declarations of Havana’ sell at Lebanon meeting on Cuba

Participants in the Beirut celebration of 50 years of the Cuban Revolution snapped up 11 copies of *The First and Second Declarations of Havana* in Arabic, published by the Athens publishing house Diethnes Vima.

Adopted by million-strong assemblies of the Cuban people in 1960 and 1962, these documents continue to stand as manifestos of revolutionary struggle by working people the world over.

Pathfinder volunteers staffed a large stand featuring titles on Cuba and world politics. Six other Pathfinder titles in English, French, and Spanish were sold. These included *New International* no. 12 featuring the article “Capitalism’s Long Hot Winter Has Begun” and various titles on the Cuban Revolution. Some Palestinian participants had been students in Cuba and were fluent in Spanish.

—G.M.

THE MILITANT

Jail and convict killer cops!

The ‘Militant’ campaigns for the full prosecution, conviction, and punishment of killer cops like the Oakland-area transit cop who shot and killed 22-year-old Oscar Grant on New Year’s Day. The paper joined with protesters demanding justice. Don’t miss an issue.



Oakland, California, protest January 7 against killing of 22-year-old Oscar Grant.

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Socialist candidates say ‘End U.S. aid to Israel!’

San Diego

BY ELLIE GARCIA

SAN DIEGO, California—James Harris, Socialist Workers Party candidate for Los Angeles mayor, received applause and shouts of approval as he spoke at a Let Gaza Live! rally and march here January 17.

The events were organized by Al-Awda, Palestine Right to Return Coalition, Free Palestine Alliance, National Council of Arab Americans, Muslim American Society Freedom Foundation San Diego Chapter, Middle East Cultural and Information Center, ANSWER Coalition, and San Diego International Action Center.

Nearly 350 people attended the rally, held in Balboa Park. The demonstration was one of several protests in the last few weeks here against Israel’s assault.

“Recently, the current mayor of Los Angeles, Antonio Villaraigosa, has been solidarizing himself with what Israel is doing in Gaza,” Harris said to the rally. “The real truth is, Israel has been the aggressor for 60 years.”

“My campaign calls for the withdrawal of Israeli troops. Stop the bombing, end all U.S. aid to Israel, end the blockade of Gaza, which is a criminal act! For a democratic and secular Palestine!”

During the march and at the Harris for Mayor campaign table several people came up to the socialist candidate to shake his hand and wish him luck in his campaign. Two students from Palomar College in San Marcos invited Harris to come speak at their campus.

New York

BY OLGA RODRÍGUEZ
AND WILLIE COTTON

NEW YORK—A contingent of campaign supporters of Dan Fein, Socialist Workers Party candidate for mayor in this city, joined hundreds in a march and rally January 19 in support of the Palestinian struggle. The demonstration, held on the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday,

—MILITANT LABOR FORUMS—

IOWA

Des Moines

The Deepening Attacks on Workers’ Rights: The Role of the Cops, Courts, Secret Police, and the Military. Speaker: Helen Meyers, Socialist Workers Party. Fri., Jan. 30. Dinner, 6:30 p.m.; program, 7:30 p.m. 3707 Douglas Ave. Tel: (515) 255-1707.

NEW JERSEY

Newark

Free the Fort Dix Frame-up Victims. Speakers: Families of defendants Shnewer and Duka; Ruth Robinett, Socialist Workers Party. Fri., Jan. 30. Dinner, 7 p.m.; program, 8 p.m. 168 Bloomfield Ave., 2nd Floor. Tel: (973) 481-0077.

NEW ZEALAND

Auckland

In Defense of Workers Rights. Speakers: Annalucia Vermunt, Communist League; and others. Fri., Jan. 30, 7 p.m. Suite 3, 7 Mason Ave., Otahuhu. Upstairs, above laundromat. Tel: (09) 276-8885.

came a day after the cease-fire between Hamas and Israel.

Addressing the rally, Fein said to much applause, “The Socialist Workers campaign denounces the Israeli aggression over the past three weeks which resulted in the deaths of 1,300 Palestinians—an aggression that was due in part to the billions in aid Israel receives from the U.S. government.”

“As you know,” Fein continued, “there is a cease-fire in Gaza. Israel won the war. But that is not the end of the story. We can be sure the Palestinian people will continue the struggle, be it around water rights, political prisoners, land, opening the borders, or political rights.”

Demonstrators marched from Union Square to Washington Square Park through a continuous snowfall, chanting “Israeli troops, out now!” and “Free, free Palestine.”

The march was led by dozens of Muslim women and children. Many of the demonstrators were youth, including a spirited group of more than 20 who came from Brooklyn.

“We want to show the American

Havana book panel to discuss U.S. class struggle

BY SAM MANUEL

One of the book presentations taking place at this year’s Havana International Book Fair, scheduled for February 12–22, will feature three titles by Pathfinder Press on the class struggle in the United States. They are Spanish translations of *Is Socialist Revolution in the U.S. Possible?* by Mary-Alice Waters, in a new, expanded edition, and of *Teamster Rebellion* and *Teamster Power* by Farrell Dobbs. The two books on the historic 1930s organizing battles of the Teamsters union in the Upper Midwest are now available together in Spanish for the first time ever.

Participants in the panel presentation of the books will include two Cuban trade unionists—Miguel Toledo, general secretary of the National Sugar Workers Union, and Martha Martínez, of the Americas section of the World Federation of Trade Unions. Also speaking will be a representative of Cuba’s Federation of University Students and Róger Calero, a member of the Socialist Workers Party National Committee. Calero is a former meat packer and member of the United Food and Commercial Workers union in the Midwest.

Is Socialist Revolution in the U.S. Possible? contains a presentation that Waters, editor of the magazine *New International* and president of Pathfinder Press, gave at the central forum on the theme “The United States: a possible revolution” during the 2007 Venezuela International Book Fair in Caracas. Waters answers “yes” without hesitation to the question posed by the title of the book.

She explains the impact of the deepening world capitalist crisis, at that time only beginning, and the spreading imperialist wars. She points to the revolutionary legacy of the working class in the United States, from the Civil War to massive fights today for the legalization of immigrants, noting that, “a fighting vanguard of the working class has emerged in action.”

The expanded edition includes Waters’s remarks at a panel during the 2008



Militant/Sylvia Hansen

James Harris, Socialist Workers candidate for mayor of Los Angeles, addresses marchers at Let Gaza Live! rally January 17 in San Diego.

people that there is another side in this fight,” said Jehan, who came with two other classmates from John Dewey High School in the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn. “The media doesn’t give the American people a choice; it only gives Israel’s side,” she continued. The three students have posted and passed out

leaflets on the situation in Palestine in an effort to reach out to classmates and teachers. They are organizing a Gaza Awareness Day on campus.

The demonstration was organized by the Break the Siege on Gaza coalition, which includes Al-Awda, International Action Center, and others.

book fair in Caracas, which launched the publication in Spanish of *Is Socialist Revolution in the U.S. Possible?* by the Venezuelan publishing house Monte Avila. There she reviewed how well the perspective presented a year earlier looked in light of the deepening contraction of capitalist production worldwide.

Teamster Rebellion and *Teamster Power* are the first two of a four-volume series by Farrell Dobbs, a leader of the communist movement and a central organizer of the 1930s Teamster strikes, organizing drives, and political

campaigns that transformed that union throughout the Midwest into a fighting industrial union movement.

The first volume describes the 1934 Minneapolis Teamster strikes, which helped pave the way for the rise of the industrial unions in the United States. *Teamster Power* details the 11-state over-the-road organizing campaign that extended union power into much of the region.

Rebelión Teamster was published in 2004, and the second volume, *Poder Teamster*, was released in 2008.

2.6 million jobs cut last year, largest annual loss since 1945

BY CINDY JAQUITH

The year 2008 closed with the largest annual jump in U.S. employment since 1945. With 2.6 million jobs cut by the bosses in 12 months, the official jobless rate rose to 7.2 percent in December, the Department of Labor said.

The 7.2 percent figure does not count workers who the government claims haven’t looked for a job in four weeks, workers holding part-time jobs because they can’t find full-time work, and those who are categorized as too “discouraged” to look for work. If these are included, the actual unemployment rate is 13.5 percent of the workforce.

Half of all the manufacturing jobs eliminated were cut in the last three months, with the biggest drops in metal fabrication and auto production. Construction unemployment rose to 15.3 percent. Temporary jobs, a last refuge for the unemployed, declined by 81,000 in December.

The average workweek shrank to 33.3 hours overall.

The official unemployment rate for Blacks stood at 11.9 percent; Latinos at 9.2 percent; whites, 6.6 percent; and teenagers, 20.8 percent. Among Black teenagers, however, the rate was 33.7 percent.

Female heads of household saw their unemployment rate shoot up to 9.5 percent, up from 6.9 percent a year ago. The number of people forced to work at least two jobs to get by rose in December to 7.4 million.

In its ongoing effort to disguise the true scope of unemployment, the Labor Department announced in January that it has replaced the category of unemployed defined as “searched for work and available to work now” with “marginally attached to the labor force.”

More than 200,000 people without jobs who have received two extensions of their unemployment compensation this year will lose their benefits in the coming weeks, the *New York Times* reported January 12.

The January 13 *Wall Street Journal* argued that despite all this news, there is a “silver lining” in the soaring unemployment: “Companies are cutting back so aggressively that they may be increasing their productivity. . . . Businesses appear to have squeezed more out of the workers they kept on staff, increasing business productivity.”

The bosses do this by speedup, lengthening the work day, combining jobs, cutting corners on safety, hiring temporary workers, and gutting union work rules.

Australia to Minnesota: No to Israeli assault!

BY BOB AIKEN

SYDNEY, Australia—Some 10,000 people marched here January 18 to protest the Israeli offensive in Gaza.

“A grave injustice is taking place,” Jamal Uddanin, originally from Bangladesh, told the *Militant*. “How can innocent women and children face machine guns and bombs?”

Sajidah Ismael, a Lebanese-Australian student, said that she had come to the protest because “it’s important for our voices to be heard. It seems the world is not doing much.”

Around 12,000 took part in a similar rally in Melbourne. The protests, which took place the day an Israeli cease-fire was announced, condemned the Australian government’s support for Israel’s offensive.

Australian foreign minister Steven Smith has called on Hamas, which heads the Palestinian government in Gaza, to respect the Israeli cease-fire, declaring that “smuggling” of arms into Gaza “for use by Hamas” must end.

Speakers at the Sydney rally included journalist and filmmaker John Pilger; Sheik Hilaly, imam of the Lakemba mosque; Paul McAleer, assistant secretary of the Sydney branch of the Maritime Union of Australia; Sylvia Hale, Greens member of the New South Wales state parliament; Antony Loewenstein, author of *My Israel Question*; and Ikebal Patel, president of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils.



BY NATALIE MORRISON

MINNEAPOLIS—Hundreds of protesters marched through the wind and snow here January 17 to demand immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops from

Gaza. Their slogans included, “No U.S. funding for the Israeli massacre in Gaza”; “Immediate cease-fire in Gaza”; and “Solidarity with the Palestinian people.”

“I was sitting in a coffee shop and saw the demonstration going by,” said Hadj, an immigrant from Algeria who joined the march. “I was very glad to see this. I had to join in.”

Hamdi Adan, from Somalia, said, “I am here because I will fight for all oppressed people.”

At one point the march passed an apartment building where two people on the balcony were flying a Cuban flag alongside a portrait of Che Guevara. Many of the protesters waved and chanted, “*Viva, viva, Palestina!*” (Spanish for Long Live Palestine!)

A majority of the protesters were youth, ranging from high school to college age. At least half of the marchers



Militant/Bob Aiken

Demonstrators in Sydney, Australia, protest Israeli offensive in Gaza, January 18.

were from Palestine or other parts of the Middle East, but many young people from Somalia and U.S.-born students from local universities also participated.

Tom Fiske, Socialist Workers Party candidate for mayor of Minneapolis,

was at the protest campaigning for an end to all imperialist wars; self-determination for the Palestinian people; a democratic, secular Palestine; and the necessity of the U.S. working class taking political power.

End the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip

Continued from front page

European participation in patrolling Gaza’s Mediterranean coastline; and U.S. and NATO involvement throughout the region in stopping weapons shipments and other aid to Hamas.

Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni said that the border crossings into Gaza will not be fully reopened nor the economic blockade of Gaza lifted until Hamas releases Gilad Schalit, an Israeli soldier held by Hamas since 2006.

Six European government leaders flew to Jerusalem the day after the cease-fire for dinner with Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert, Livni, Israeli defense minister Ehud Barak, and opposition Likud candidate Benjamin Netanyahu to demonstrate their support for Tel Aviv. They brought with them British, Italian, French, and German offers of military and economic help to enforce the terms of the cease-fire, including maritime patrols.

Earlier in the afternoon the six, including French president Nicolas Sarkozy, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and British prime minister Gordon Brown, had attended a summit at the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm e-Sheikh hosted by Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak. Also at the summit was Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority based on the West Bank, along with the presidents of Turkey, Jordan, and the European Union, and the secretary generals of the United Nations and the Arab League.

The Israeli assault left more than 1,300 Palestinians dead and 5,000 wounded. Hours after the Israeli cease-fire announcement Hamas representatives in Syria and Gaza also proclaimed a cease-fire.

The Israel Defense Forces said it would rapidly withdraw all Israeli soldiers from Gaza, but that troops would be stationed at key points around the Strip.

Tel Aviv announced the cease-fire after a round of visits to Cairo, where Hamas and Israeli representatives met separately with Egyptian negotiators.

Israeli forces hit more than 2,000 sites in Gaza during the assault, sometimes wiping out an entire row of houses in one strike. About a third of the Palestinian casualties were children. Half of the

population of Gaza is 18 or younger.

Speaking at a January 20 conference in Doha, capital of Qatar, Hamas leader Khaled Meshal said that Hamas was surprised because it believed the Israeli offensive would last no longer than three days, according to Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram*. “We didn’t expect the crimes that were committed against our citizens, the residents of Gaza,” Meshal said. He also said that Hamas expected that there would be massive protests in front of Egyptian embassies that would force Cairo to open the Rafah border crossing with Gaza.

Instead, the Egyptian government easily withstood criticism that it was aiding Israel, and kept the crossing closed.

Defeat for Hamas

The Israeli assault dealt Hamas a military and political defeat.

Many government and municipal offices in Gaza were completely destroyed during the assault. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, close to 300 tunnels were destroyed along with 200 homes belonging to Hamas commanders, and “most of its long-range rocket capability has been knocked out.”

In the Jabalya refugee camp north of Gaza City, almost every dwelling was hit. In the camp there are 74,000 people per square kilometer, one of the highest population densities in the world, compared with 25,000 in Manhattan, New York.

For the most part Hamas avoided direct combat with Israeli troops. Its armed units fired homemade mortars and rockets in hit-and-run strikes from heavily populated working-class neighborhoods.

Israeli forces did not attempt to penetrate deep into Gaza City neighborhoods. Instead they pounded the city from the outskirts and from air and sea. Some 4,000 homes in the Strip were destroyed and tens of thousands left homeless.

Ten Israeli soldiers died during the assault, several from “friendly fire,” and some 230 were wounded.

Halima Dardouna, 37, from Jabalya, whose house was destroyed by an Israeli shell, told the *New York Times*, “I will never vote for Hamas. They are not able to protect the people, and if they are go-

ing to bring this on us, why should they be in power?”

France 2 television reported that the European Union said it will lift sanctions on Gaza if a Palestinian “unity” government is established, in other words, if Fatah—Abbas’s party—is brought back into the Gaza government.

Hamas defeated Fatah, which runs the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, in elections in the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian parliament in January 2006. Hamas then pushed Fatah out of Gaza in open fighting in June 2007.

Hamas won the 2006 election in the Gaza Strip in part because it painted itself as more “radical” and less corrupt than Fatah. It is a bourgeois party that has been an obstacle to organizing a fight by Palestinians against the Israeli occupation and for land and water rights, labor unions, women’s equality, the right of return, and the release of political prisoners.

While only the Jordanian and Egyptian governments have signed “peace” deals with the Israeli state, Tel Aviv has made progress in winning acceptance for its existence from other Arab regimes in the region.

This was reflected at the two-day Arab League economic summit in Kuwait that ended January 20. The 17 heads of Arab states and senior representatives of five other member states were unable to come up with a joint statement on the events in Gaza.

Tel Aviv sees Lebanon war as model

The *Jerusalem Post* noted January 1 that top Israeli army leaders saw the 2006 Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon as a model for the attack on Gaza. “After all, though Hizbullah is stronger and has more missiles and rockets than before the war, the northern border has never been so quiet,” the *Post* said. “It is this kind of quiet—not the toppling of Hamas or the imposing of a new regime in Gaza—that Israel is hoping to achieve through Operation Cast Lead.”

Although Hamas has said that its long-term goal is an Islamic state in all of Palestine, its position is not so different from Fatah. Hamas says that it would accept an independent state in Gaza and the West Bank, an implicit recognition of the Israeli state.

2009 ‘Militant’ Renewal Drive Jan. 24 – Feb. 24	
Country	Quota
UNITED STATES	
Atlanta	*
Boston	10
Chicago	20
Des Moines, IA	15
Houston	15
Los Angeles	20
Miami	25
New York	*
Newark, NJ	20
Philadelphia	*
San Francisco	25
Seattle	12
Twin Cities, MN	*
Washington, D.C.	*
U.S. Total	162
AUSTRALIA	25
SWEDEN	8
UNITED KINGDOM	
Edinburgh	*
London	*
UK Total	*
CANADA	*
NEW ZEALAND	*
Int’l Totals	195
* Goal not yet adopted	

Islamists take over bases as Somali gov't weakens

BY BEN JOYCE

Ethiopian troops supporting the interim government in Somalia have withdrawn from the capital, Mogadishu, and Islamist forces have taken over four of the six vacated military bases.

The proimperialist interim government now controls only the remaining two bases with some 10,000 troops. African Union troops from Uganda and Burundi, which number about 2,400, are defending the presidential palace.

The current government in Mogadishu was set up in December 2006 when a U.S.-backed invasion by Ethiopian troops ousted the Somali Islamic Courts Council from power. The Ethiopian government has maintained a force in Somalia since then but had made little progress in strengthening the Somali government in Mogadishu. Rival bourgeois Islamist forces have been gaining ground, particu-

larly in southern Somalia.

Somalia's strategic position in the Horn of Africa is important to the major imperialist powers for military reasons and because it is a major trade route between Europe and Asia.

Washington secured a resolution from the UN Security Council January 16 expressing intent to establish a UN troop presence in Somalia. The resolution calls for the UN force to replace the African Union troops currently stationed there and enforce "the effective reestablishment and training of inclusive Somali security forces, including military police and judiciary."

But UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in December he had approached 50 governments to participate in such a multinational force and their response was "very lukewarm or negative."

The U.S. Navy announced January 15 that Washington is close to a deal with



African Union troops in Somalia with captured weapons. Proimperialist government there now controls only two of six military bases vacated by Ethiopian troops.

an unnamed government in the region that would agree to prosecute and imprison those captured by the U.S. military on piracy charges.

Last month the UN Security Council unanimously passed a resolution authorizing military operations on Somali land and airspace against "piracy."

Moisés Mory urges support for antideportation battle

BY SARA LOBMAN

NEWARK, New Jersey—"It is quite a victory that has taken place in a struggle that started in 1999," Moisés Mory, a Peruvian immigrant fighting deportation, told a special Militant Labor Forum here January 18. "Now that I am out of prison I have more ways to work on winning this fight."

Mory is a three-decade resident of the United States. He was released on parole from Hudson County Jail on January 2, after four-and-a-half years of detention. He still faces the threat of deportation.

The organizers of the Militant Labor Forum moved the program from the regular Friday night slot to Sunday afternoon, because the conditions for Mory's release include a 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew. He is also forced to wear an electronic ankle bracelet. Mory has applied for a renewal of his work permit, which expired while he was in prison, but is still not able to work.

Immigration cops began their efforts to deport Mory in the late 1990s, based on a misdemeanor conviction more than a decade earlier. He was jailed for a year, then released, then arrested again in 2004. At that time Mory was president of Local 13742 of the United Steelworkers of America and a machine operator at a plastics factory in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

"Thanks to the *Militant* newspaper, and to the lessons in the books and pamphlets published by Pathfinder, I was not discouraged and was able to continue to struggle," Mory said. "I was able to share with other prisoners not only my experiences as a unionist but what I was learning about the world from the *Militant*, the books, and from visits by members of the Socialist Workers Party."

Mory was joined on the platform by Michael Taber, who spoke representing the Socialist Workers Party. "Moisés is an example of working-class struggle and resistance," Taber said. "They couldn't break him. He resisted every attempt to pressure him to give up. He fought every act of injustice against his rights. And he helped

other detainees to do the same."

Mory explained that while in prison he tried hard to maintain friendly relations with fellow detainees from all over the world. "This was hard to do because the whole system was organized to keep people divided and separate," he said. Detainees came from Algeria, China, Korea, Lebanon, Palestine, Jamaica, Haiti, Trinidad, Grenada, Honduras, Mexico, and elsewhere. "In one prison I was in, in Alabama, we were successful in beginning to unite, which was a surprise to the officials," he said.

Participants stayed around for a dinner and further discussion. Mory was invited to speak to immigrant workers in Morristown, New Jersey. He will also be speaking at the Militant Labor Forum in New York on January 25.

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO



February 3, 1984

RODEO, California—The killing of striker Greg Goobic on a picket line here has made striking workers at the Union Oil refinery more determined than ever to take on this powerful oil giant.

The union on strike, Local 1-326 of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW), called a memorial march for Goobic January 25. Memorials were also to take place at other Union Oil operations around the country, including the company's refinery at Wilmington, California, which is also being struck.

Goobic was killed while picketing at the Union Oil refinery's main gate the evening of January 19. He was 20 years old. An 18-wheel truck driven by a nonunion driver ran a red light and failed to stop or even slow down as it approached the main gate. Eyewitnesses report that the truck actually sped up, knocking down Goobic and running over him.



February 2, 1959

The Committee to Combat Racial Injustice has protested misinformation issued by the U.S. Embassy in Holland about the sentencing of James Hanover Thompson, 10, and David Simpson, 8, to indeterminate sentences in a North Carolina reformatory because a 7-year-old white girl had kissed the older boy.

Press services reported that the chief press officer of the Embassy in Holland had told protesters that no racial discrimination was involved and that the boys had been sent up for "thefts."

The CCRI, which is seeking release of the two children, cabled its protest to the U.S. press officer in Holland and wrote to [U.S. Secretary of State John Foster] Dulles demanding that the Embassy in Holland be silenced and that an investigation of the issuance of the false information be made. On January 15 school children in the Hague gave the press a copy of a letter to the U.S. Ambassador expressing their indignation.



February 2, 1934

The strike wave launched by the general strike of the hotel and restaurant workers in New York has spread to the taxicab industry. 30,000 cab drivers went on strike today. The last straw which let loose the accumulation of bitter grievances was the disposition of the 5 cent tax on all rides.

The strike is spreading like wildfire. The *New York Evening Journal* admitted on February 2 that "they crippled service at the Grand Central Terminal, for example, that scarcely one cab was available there—generally there are five hundred."

Old-timers who have been through other strikes say this is one of the greatest demonstrations of solidarity in the history of the industry. By a unanimous vote of the strike meeting of the United Taxi Drivers Union of Greater New York, every cab was ordered off the street.

Restructuring an industry: when v

Former sugar workers in study-as-work program in Cuba are ‘more con

BY JONATHAN SILBERMAN,
MARTÍN KOPPEL,
AND MARY-ALICE WATERS

(First of two articles)

SANTA CRUZ DEL NORTE, Cuba—“When you first came here in 2003, the reorganization of the sugar industry had only just begun. For many sugar workers, it was hard to get used to the idea of starting a new job or going to school again. Today we’re more confident about what we can accomplish. The mentality has changed.”

This is how Odalys Balcel summed up what she considered the biggest change among workers at the former Camilo Cienfuegos sugar complex here, 30 miles east of Havana. Balcel is one of the leaders at the agricultural enterprise that was established with the closure of the sugar mill in 2002.

In April of that year the Cuban government initiated a radical cutback and reorganization of the sugar industry, which had been the cornerstone of Cuba’s economy for more than 150 years. Ninety of the island’s 155 sugar mills have been closed, 50 having been idled even prior to April 2002. Some 3.4 million acres of farmland were taken out of sugarcane cultivation and allocated to more diversified agriculture and forestry in order to increase both the quantity and quality of food production and reduce dependence on imports. The jobs of half the workers employed directly in sugar production were eliminated, with all workers guaranteed employment with no cut in pay.

The need to take such steps had been posed sharply by the economic crisis in Cuba that exploded in the early 1990s with the abrupt end of aid and trade on preferential terms with the former Soviet bloc countries, which had long-term contracts for purchasing the bulk of Cuban sugar exports. The crisis was deepened by



Militant/Martín Koppel (above), Jonathan Silberman (right)
Above, students and teachers at Camilo Cienfuegos School for Further Education, at the former sugar complex in Santa Cruz del Norte, Havana province, in February 2007. More than 120,000 former sugar workers in Cuba enrolled in study-as-work program. Right, former worker-students who are now teachers at the school. From left: William Mesa, Edel Madruga, and Joaquín Almaguer.



the simultaneous tightening of the U.S. trade embargo, which has now lasted for nearly 50 years.

It was only with the beginning of a recovery from the most desperate years of what Cubans know as the Special Period, however, that it became possible—and unpostponable—to address the challenge of restructuring the sugar industry.

The consequences of the loss of Cuba’s primary export market; falling productivity due to obsolete plants, equipment, and lack of spare parts; rising prices for fuel and other imported inputs; and the declining price of sugar on the world market—all these combined to make the restructuring unavoidable and urgent.

The steps toward agricultural diversification and increased food self-sufficiency that have been taken as part of this process also corresponded

to a stated goal of the revolutionary struggle in Cuba since its inception in the early 1950s.

For workers in capitalist countries, industrial “restructuring” inevitably means unemployment for many, combined with speed-up and longer hours for those who remain, union busting, pay cuts, and often loss of health-care insurance and pensions for both current and retired employees.

The reorganization in Cuba has been carried out by a government of working people acting to advance their class interests and to defend the alliance of workers and farmers on which the socialist revolution depends. It shows what becomes possible when workers and farmers take state power through a revolutionary struggle to overturn the rule of the capitalist lords of industry, land, and banking—those who today are in panic mode throughout the world trying to protect their wealth and privileges.

The sugar industry reorganization was presented in a 2002 “Programmatic Document” prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Union of Sugar Workers (SNTA), and discussed nationwide in multiple rounds of workplace assemblies that hammered out the changes. It guaranteed the “inviolable principles” that no one would be left to fend for himself or herself, that the wage of each and every worker would be guaranteed and each would be assured employment, schooling, or both. (See accompanying excerpt from the Programmatic Document.)

Study-as-work program

The restructuring plan offers sugar workers whose jobs have been eliminated the opportunity to study while continuing to be paid their average monthly wages. Since most sugar workers receive production bonuses during the roughly four-month harvest season, the average monthly wage, workers explained to us, is higher than the base wage.

Militant reporters visited the Camilo Cienfuegos complex in February 2003, after the sugar mill had closed and this study-as-work program was just beginning. (See “Radical reorganization and cutback of Cuba’s sugar industry” and “Cutback, restructuring of sugar industry: Cuban workers explain how it affects them” in the February 9 and 16, 2004, issues on www.themilitant.com.) On return visits in 2007 and February 2008, we were able to follow the progress made, and in January 2009 leaders of the SNTA gave us a further update.

The sugar workers’ study-as-work program launched in 2002 offered full- or part-time education for an indefinite period to all those affected by the reorganization. This was one of a number of initiatives by Cuba’s revolutionary leadership to expand access to education and culture on a broad scale, part of a program known here as the Battle of Ideas.

Within months of its launch, more than 120,000 sugar workers across the island signed up for the study-as-work program.

“At the Camilo Cienfuegos complex you can see the results,” said Miguel Toledo, general secretary of the SNTA, who arranged the visits and accompanied us. “There have been graduations from the initial courses, but a number of workers continue to study full time, until an opportune moment arrives for a shift to a new job, inside or outside of the sugar sector.

“Others are taking courses part time and putting their newly acquired skills to work in industry or agriculture,” he noted. Still others, who were working full time when we visited in 2003, “were inspired by those who became students to start studying part time themselves.”

While going back to school was a major change for workers at the outset, now “it’s become a normal part of life,” Toledo said.

At Santa Cruz del Norte, 139 workers graduated at high school level in



Vegetable farm that is part of agricultural enterprise established by former sugar workers, 3.4 million acres of farmland located to more diversified agriculture, to increase food

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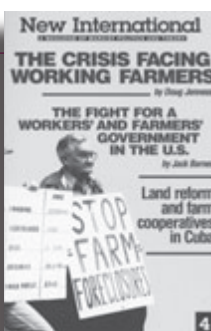
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By Mary-Alice Waters

In face of economic difficulties and challenges, Cuba’s workers and farmers continue to defend their political power, independence, and sovereignty. —\$16



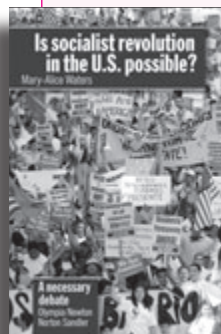
Is Socialist Revolution in the U.S. Possible?

By Mary-Alice Waters

“To conclude that a socialist revolution in the U.S. is not possible, you would have to believe that the ruling families have found a way to ‘manage’ capitalism so there won’t again be world-shaking economic, financial, or social crises.”

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workers decide confident in what we can accomplish'

2005. Some of the students have gone on to university studies, facilitated by the expansion of the university system to every one of the 169 municipalities in the country.

At the time of our 2007 visit, the Camilo Cienfuegos School for Further Education had an enrollment of 666 students, roughly the same number as when the program started in 2003. One hundred fifty-seven were full time. Some 93 were in classes up to sixth grade and 573 studying at levels between seventh and ninth grades.

Of the school's 40 teachers, 27 used

“Unlike under capitalism, the reorganization in Cuba has been carried out by a government of working people acting to advance their class interests...”

to work at the mill. One of these is former electrician Joaquín Almaguer, whom we first met and talked with in 2003. “When I started studying, I continued to work six or seven hours a day. But now I’ve graduated to become a full-time teacher,” Almaguer said with evident pride. He teaches technical drawing, Spanish, and literature.

As an incentive, former workers like Almaguer now receive the average income of those currently employed in the enterprise plus an additional 20 percent.

Expanded production

During 2007 about half of the 50,000 workers still engaged full time in the study-as-work program returned to at least part-time jobs in the sugar agro-industry, Toledo told us in February 2008.

The union leader had just returned from a visit to the Antonio Guiteras sugar complex in the eastern province of Las Tunas, the largest mill in the country. Like other mills in the east, where sugar production is concentrated today, it had suffered greatly

as a result of a five-year-long drought. “The drought was so bad that in 2006 we had only enough cane to run just over 40 of the 61 mills that should have been operating,” he said. Production was less than 1.3 million tons in 2005–2006 and fell further the next year.

The 2007–2008 harvest, with 54 mills operating, yielded the first increase since the reorganization—24 percent over the previous year. While Cuba was able to meet its international contracts, with this level of production it had to import white refined sugar from other countries to meet domestic consumption.

Last year hurricanes Gustav, Ike, and Paloma hit the island in August, September, and November, bringing an estimated \$10 billion in destruction. Major sugar mills such as the Antonio Guiteras in Las Tunas and the November 30 mill in Pinar del Río suffered particularly severe damage.

Until the hurricanes, Cuban agricultural and mill workers had been on course to raise production in 2009 by 20–30 percent over the 2007–2008 harvest, according to an October report by then-sugar minister Ulises Rosales del Toro. Output is now expected to be 1.5 million tons, the same as the last season.

Moreover, the sugarcane itself was badly hit. “This is unusual,” Miguel Toledo told *Militant* reporters in January of this year. “Normally, because the cane is so pliable, it rightens itself soon after the heavy winds. This year the winds were so intense, and flooding so widespread, that up to 20 percent of this year’s crop has been destroyed. The quality is inevitably down too, which means the yield per ton of sugarcane will be less. And next year’s harvest will also be affected, although to a lesser degree.”

In addition, some 40,000 tons of warehoused sugar was saturated and had to be reprocessed.

When the restructuring of the industry began in 2002, Toledo noted, the spot market price of sugar on the world commodity exchanges had dropped to six cents per pound—just above the cost of production in Cuba at that time. As of January 2009 it had risen to 11.5 cents per pound.

Cuba doesn’t sell on the spot market, Toledo explained. Its sugar is contracted for, long ahead of time, by China and other governments at prices higher than those on the world market. Cuba exports 400,000 tons to China, for example. This benefits both parties—China can count on a guaranteed supply and Cuba on a stable market. When spot market prices rise on world commodity exchanges, however, that strengthens Cuba’s hand in negotiating futures contracts. And the reverse when the price drops.

A significant factor in the rise in world sugar prices over the last half decade has been increased demand for ethanol, a gasoline substitute that can be produced from sugarcane. Cuba’s sugar ministry has taken steps to expand production in response.

Luis Gálvez, director of the sugar



Militant photos by Jonathan Silberman

In 2002 the Cuban government began a radical cutback and reorganization of the sugar industry. The jobs of half the workers employed directly in sugar production were eliminated, with all workers guaranteed jobs with no cut in pay. Above, Héctor Molina sugar mill in Havana province, February 2007. Right, workers dismantling Camilo Cienfuegos mill in February 2003.



ministry’s Sugarcane Derivatives Research Institute, reported in August 2008 that Cuba’s annual ethanol output was 100 million liters a year “and, with the modernization, we are going to double production.” The Cuban government has also taken steps to make the industry less reliant on oil imports through the burning of bagasse, a residue from the sugar manufacturing process.

In 2005 the sugar industry contributed 4.5 percent of total electricity generation on the island, said Bárbara Hernández, head of the sugar ministry’s energy management department. In 2008 the contribution was slightly higher.

As a result of the reorganization, workers on many former sugar coop-

eratives are now farming vegetables and fruit, raising livestock, and growing trees. These are part of broader efforts to diversify and increase agricultural production.

Over the last year, the Cuban government has initiated a number of measures to increase agricultural production. Idle land is being made available to individuals and cooperatives able to farm it. Much agricultural decision-making has been moved from the ministry to local councils. Local stores are being established where much-needed farm equipment can be purchased. In November, Rosales del Toro was reassigned as minister of agriculture.

A second article will look at these new developments.

‘No one will be left abandoned’

The political leadership challenge in carrying through the massive restructuring of sugar production—of leading the human beings who will make this transformation a reality—is the single biggest task Cuban workers and their government confront in reorganizing the sugar agro-industry.

The social and proletarian character of the reorganization is expressed in the summary from the “Programmatic Document” prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture in 2002 for distribution to sugar workers. It served as a basis for discussion in the multiple rounds of workers’ assemblies that molded the changes. The document states:

“With regard to the excess personnel resulting from the reduction in size of the work force, there are inviolable principles:

- No one will be left abandoned
- All workers will have wage guarantees
- There will be guarantees of employment or schooling for all sugar workers
- One hundred thousand sugar workers will be able to be incorporated into various advancement courses
- All workers who continue working in the sector will remain members of the sugar workers union
- All farmers will continue belonging to the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP)
- Agricultural workers whose income depends on output will continue receiving their wages on the same basis.

“The number of those taking advantage of the option of requalification and advancement—which will include the university level—is not limited by any quotas. The enormous and noble goal we aspire to is incorporating 100,000 agro-industrial workers into these requalification and advancement programs, and the facilities to accommodate them will not be lacking.

“It is possible to offer this exceptional opportunity today to our agro-industrial workers, and it’s already been done with tens of thousands of young people who were neither working nor attending school.”

—Reprinted from the Feb. 9, 2004, *Militant*



Militant/Martin Koppel

land was taken out of sugarcane production and alcohol production and reduce dependency on imports.

Women's combat platoon in Cuba's revolutionary war

Below is an excerpt from Marianas in Combat: Teté Puebla and the Mariana Grajales Women's Platoon in Cuba's Revolutionary War 1956–58, one of Pathfinder's Books of the Month for January. Edited by Mary-Alice Waters, the book tells the story of Brigadier General Teté Puebla, the highest-ranking woman in Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces, who joined the struggle to overthrow the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in 1956, when she was 15 years old. She describes becoming an officer in the Rebel Army's first all-women's platoon in 1958 and how for more than 50 years her life has been intertwined with the fight to transform the social and economic status of women, a course of action inseparable from Cuba's socialist revolution. Copyright © 2003 by Pathfinder Press. Reprinted by permission.

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

WATERS: The founding of the Mariana Grajales Women's Platoon marked a milestone in the Cuban Revolution. It demonstrated in practice the social course a victorious Rebel Army would fight for. As Karl Marx put it, you can judge any society by the status of women.



Photo courtesy Teté Puebla
Fidel Castro with members of Mariana Grajales Women's Platoon, Oct. 8, 1958, as they were leaving on a combat mission.

What led to the unit's formation?

PUEBLA: In May 1958, as the dictatorship's military offensive began, the army stepped up its repression against the population of the Sierra Maestra. Wherever the army went, women were raped, children were killed, entire villages were bombed and burned down. Peasants had to leave the Sierra. Sánchez Mosquera was one of the most infamous of Batista's commanders, but there were others.

They would announce they'd killed a lot of Rebel Army soldiers. But that wasn't true; the people killed were peasants. They were dragged out of their huts at gunpoint. They used to tie the men to poles while raping the women. Then they'd kill everyone. Whole families would be wiped out.

They were bombing villages, too. One of these was Cayo Espino, which was of no military value. Our commander has spoken about this, but for those of us who were there these crimes affected us deeply, they outraged everybody.

There was a five-year-old boy named Orestes Gutiérrez in Cayo Espino. His legs were blown off by one of the bombs, and other members of his family were wounded. Everyone in the Sierra knew the story of this little boy, who told his grandmother, holding her hand: "Grandmother, I won't be able to love you anymore because I'm going

to die." His grandfather died too. His two sisters were wounded, but they are alive today thanks to the Rebel Army doctors who gave them immediate attention. And the bombing was done in an area where there were no rebel troops.

Throughout the region of Oro de Guisa, peasant houses were set afire. The peasants who fled the flames were seized, and then raped or killed. All these crimes filled us with courage and determination. Even though we were doing many essential things, we felt frustrated that we could not fight arms in hand. "They've got to let us fight," we said.

We had already proved that women could do just about everything. We withstood the bombings, delivered weapons, and were in the places where fighting was taking place. But we were still not allowed to fight.

"If women have to take part in all the duties of the revolution," we said, "why can't we fight for the revolution in the same way as our men fight?"

After the army's offensive had been defeated, we asked our commander in chief to allow us to fight arms in hand. He agreed. Fidel said yes, women had won the right to fight with a rifle face to face with the enemy.

On September 4, 1958, a meeting took place, a sort of roundtable. Fidel assem-

bled his general staff at the time, those who were left in the Sierra Maestra. The invasion troops—Columns 2 and 8 under the command of Camilo Cienfuegos and Ernesto Che Guevara—had already left. And a Second and a Third Front had already been established in Oriente.¹

There was a discussion at this roundtable meeting that lasted more than seven hours. Fidel had a very big argument there. There were still not enough weapons for everyone, and the men were saying, "How can we give rifles to women when there are so many men who are unarmed?"

Fidel answered: "Because they're better soldiers than you are. They're more disciplined."

"In any event," he said, "I'm going to put together the squad, and I'm going to teach them how to shoot."

So on September 4, the Mariana Grajales Women's Platoon was formed. As I explained, Isabel Rielo became the commanding officer. I was named second in command. The squad came to have thirteen combatants in it. The commander in chief chose the name as a tribute to Mariana Grajales, a heroine of our war of independence and the mother of Antonio Maceo, the legendary general who fought heroically in Cuba's wars of independence for over thirty years.

Fidel was the one who taught us to shoot. We had to hit a quarter—or a 20-centavo coin—20 to 30 meters away, depending on how he wanted to test our aim. And he drilled us. We had to split that coin.

In fact, Isabel Rielo was named the commanding officer as a result of target practice. Because she was a better shot than I was. Fidel had said that whoever was the best shot would be named head of the platoon.

1. In March 1958 the Rebel Army founded a Second and Third Front, led by Raúl Castro and Juan Almeida respectively, to extend the war from the Sierra Maestra to the rest of Oriente province. In the following months two new columns were formed to undertake a westward "invasion" of Cuba's central and eastern provinces. These were Column 8 led by Ernesto Che Guevara and Column 2 commanded by Camilo Cienfuegos.

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Lift the Israeli blockade on Gaza!

After making significant gains with its assault on the Gaza Strip, the Israeli government withdrew its troops, redeploying many along the Gaza-Israel border. Tel Aviv is keeping full control over Gaza's commercial border crossings.

Working people should demand an immediate end to the military and economic blockade of Gaza. Open all border crossings.

The Israeli assault killed more than 1,300 Palestinians, wounded 5,000, left tens of thousands homeless, damaged 1,500 factories and workshops, and caused nearly \$2 billion of destruction.

Tel Aviv insists it has the right to review every item entering Gaza and requires its approval for every person traveling there to help with rebuilding.

The protests by hundreds of thousands around the world against the Israeli aggression took place in the context of the deepening capitalist economic crisis driven by a worldwide contraction in production. These actions became an avenue to protest the assault on fellow working people in Gaza and to give expression to the growing anger at rising unemployment, cuts in health care and education, and other attacks on our living standards. For many demonstrators, including the 12,000 in Washington, D.C., and others at several protests in New York and other cities, these were their first political actions.

The resistance to the spreading capitalist disorder and wars, of which these actions are a part, registers the growing openness of workers and youth to the need to take power out of the hands of the capitalist rulers around the world as the only way

to end imperialist wars and assaults—whether in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Palestine—and to build a society based on human needs not profits.

The actions of Hamas confirm that far from being a liberation movement it is a bourgeois party that is an obstacle to the fight against the Israeli assaults, the economic blockade, for land and water rights, freedom of political prisoners, and the right to travel. Its course over several years left the vast majority of Palestinians unprepared for the Israeli assault and all but ensured the Israeli victory. Fatah is no better. While the Israeli assault was going on, it broke up Palestinian demonstrations in the West Bank.

Tel Aviv has abandoned its dreams of a "Greater Israel." Instead it fenced off Gaza, including a one-third-mile-wide "buffer" zone that affects a large part of the area's farmland. And it is still building a wall through the West Bank to separate Palestinians and Israelis and set up a smaller, more defensible Israeli state.

Israeli Arabs, a growing part of the Israeli population, are becoming more assertive in demanding their democratic rights, as well as opposing Tel Aviv's economic and military assaults on Gaza.

Tel Aviv's victory in Gaza will not halt these fights by Israel's Palestinian citizens or the people of Gaza and the West Bank.

Their struggles can open the road towards the fight for a democratic secular Palestine where all who live there—Jews, Arabs, Muslims, Christians, and nonbelievers—have the same rights and protections.

Capitalist crisis stirs E. Europe protests

Continued from front page

their produce and government corruption, joined student protests January 14 in Sofia, Bulgaria's capital.

The protests have been met by government repression in all three countries, turning into street battles with dozens injured and arrested by the cops.

Up until the world economic downturn took another dip in the later part of last year, the three countries had registered steady economic growth buoyed by foreign investment and a housing boom.

Latvia's economy, which had grown at an 11 percent rate in 2007, came to a jarring halt in the third quarter in 2008 as it shrank by 4.2 percent, the sharpest economic contraction in the European Union, said the BBC News. Housing prices have dropped 24 percent in the last three months. Thousands now face layoffs and wage cuts.

According to recent estimates, the economies of some Eastern European countries, after registering double-digit growth for nearly a decade, are expected to contract by up to 5 percent this year,

with inflation rates rising by more than 13 percent, reported the *Observer*.

Krisjanis Karins, a member of the Latvian parliament and leader of the opposition New Era party, told the *New York Times* that the crisis had injected a "new vehemence into old political complaints."

Protests in Latvia tended to follow a pattern of "standing, singing and just going home," said Karins. But now they "seem to think the Greek or French way of expressing anger is better. . . . Who are these people? Where did they come from?"

In the midst of this brewing social crisis, rightist and incipient fascist forces are playing on the disappointments and resentments of middle-class layers and better-off sections of the working class, fueling chauvinist, antiforeigner, and racist attitudes against national minorities and others.

In the Czech Republic, which has also been badly hit by the economic downturn, a march of 700 members of the far-right Workers' Party in the town of Litvinov battled police, who succeeded in preventing the rightists from marching into a predominately Roma (Gypsy) area.

LETTERS

Auto layoffs in Spain

The January 12 article on the auto bailout makes a passing reference to production cutbacks in Spain. This barely scratches the surface. The Spanish auto industry directly and indirectly employs about 9 percent of the workforce. As of early January, some 70,000 workers have been laid off either permanently or temporarily or have had their hours cut.

Ford, Seat, and Nissan have already announced layoffs totaling over 10,000 workers for 2009, and Renault will shut down entirely for three months, idling another 10,000. Nearly 25,000 workers in related industries such as component manufacturing have been laid off already.

Arnold Weissberg
Madrid, Spain

Error on prison population

The "Greetings to workers behind bars!" editorial in the January 12 issue says that "nearly 2.3 million men and women—one out of every 99 residents of the United States—sit behind bars." If that were the case, the number behind bars would have to be over 3 million, because the U.S. population is over 300 million.

'Militant' Prisoners' Fund

The Prisoners' Fund makes it possible to send prisoners reduced-rate subscriptions. To donate, send a check or money order payable to the Militant and earmarked "Prisoners' Fund" to 306 W. 37th St., 10th Floor, New York, NY 10018.

I believe that instead of "residents," perhaps the figure relates to the number of "adults" in the United States.

Michael Pennock
Alexandria, Minnesota

In reply—You are correct, it is one out of 99 adults that is in U.S. prisons. Thanks for pointing out the error.

—Editor

The letters column is an open forum for all viewpoints on subjects of interest to working people. Please keep your letters brief. Where necessary they will be abridged. Please indicate if you prefer that your initials be used rather than your full name.

Tel Aviv asked for U.S. help to bomb nuclear site in Iran

BY CINDY JAQUITH

In early 2008 the Israeli government prepared the bombing of an underground nuclear facility in Natanz, Iran, but U.S. president George Bush rebuffed Tel Aviv's request for help in doing so. At about the same time, Washington stepped up its own program to covertly undermine the Iranian nuclear project, the *New York Times* reported January 11.

Washington, Tel Aviv, and their imperialist allies charge that Iran is seeking to develop nuclear weapons under the cover of its nuclear energy program. Tehran has denied the charge and rejected demands that it stop enriching uranium, which can be used to fuel nuclear power plants or nuclear weapons.

The *Times* story, written by David Sanger, was based on interviews with anonymous U.S., Israeli, and European government officials. Neither Washington nor Tel Aviv has denied the report.

Sanger wrote that Tel Aviv asked Washington for "a new generation of bunker-buster bombs, far more capable of blowing up a deep underground plant than anything in Israel's arsenal of conventional weapons. They also asked for refueling equipment that would allow their aircraft to reach Iran and return to Israel. And they asked for the right to fly over Iraq."

In 2005 Washington approved a package to sell as many as 100 GBU-28 laser-guided bunker buster bombs to Tel Aviv. A special delivery of the bombs was sent to Israel in 2006 during the Israeli military's campaign against Hezbollah in Lebanon.

According to Sanger, an aide to Bush said the president immediately denied the request to fly over Iraq and deflected the other requests, telling the Israeli government Washington had developed a new covert action program to sabotage the Iranian nuclear project.

The U.S. government also briefed Tel Aviv on this program, which consisted of trying to disrupt the chain of nuclear suppliers to Iran, harass Iranian scientists, and sabotage equipment at Natanz.

"Several details of the covert effort have been omitted from this account, at the request of senior United States intelligence and administration officials," Sanger wrote.

The first week in June 2008 the Israeli air force carried out a long-range military exercise that strongly resembled a rehearsal for bombing Iran's nuclear facilities. It included helicopters and refueling tankers that flew more than 900 miles, about the same distance from Israel to the Natanz plant in Iran.

In September 2007 Israeli jets bombed what Tel Aviv said was a nuclear weapons facility in Syria. In 1981 Israeli jets destroyed a nuclear reactor in Iraq.

The Bush administration has sought Iranian help in bringing Shiite militias, like Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army, to heel in Iraq. There have also been ongoing backdoor talks with Iran.

The Bush administration continued to rely on a broad range of sanctions against Iran and exploiting any opportunity to win over elements in Iran's capitalist class who want to compromise for the sake of ending Iran's economic isolation.

Washington has also worked to firm up relations with Arab states in the region as a bulwark against Iran. On January 16, for example, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice signed a nuclear energy cooperation pact with the United Arab Emirates under which the UAE relinquishes its right to enrich uranium.

"We applaud the UAE's commitment to the highest standards of safety, security, and non-proliferation in the pursuit of nuclear power," Rice said, pointedly noting that the Iranian government has refused to follow U.S. dictates in terms of nuclear power.

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